

LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION HEARING ON THE  
GOVERNOR'S REORGANIZATION PLAN  
FOR REFORMING CALIFORNIA'S  
YOUTH AND ADULT CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM

JANUARY 27, 2005, STATE CAPITOL, SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

INPUT FROM CINDY MARIE ABSEY  
PUBLIC POLICY CO-CHAIR FOR THE CALIFORNIA VICTIM & WITNESS  
COORDINATING COUNCIL

Testimony presented by  
Linda Mitcham, President, California Victim and Witness Coordinating Council

Introduction:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to this Commission on the Governor's Reorganization Plan for the Youth and Adult Correctional Agency (YACA). As the Public Policy Co-Chair for the California Victim & Witness Coordinating Council (CVWCC), these comments are submitted on behalf of the 59 Victim/Witness Assistance Centers in California serving approximately 150,000 new crime victims last year in all 58 counties. Since the legislature created Victim/Witness Centers in 1983, Victim/Witness Centers remain the sole providers of comprehensive services to all types of crime victims in California. As a victim service partner with Corrections Office of Victim Services and Restitution, we appreciate the efforts by YACA to improve their organization in a way that will benefit victims thereby achieving justice.

Input on Governor's Reorganization Plan & Recommendations:

- 1) We support the Governor's plan to reorganize YACA into a new Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. The new, clearly defined management structure, consolidated services and statewide cross-training should significantly improve the accountability and performance of line managers, enhance consistency and reduce the duplication of services and activities throughout the organization, thereby reducing costs.
- 2) We enthusiastically endorse the inclusion of the new "Office of Victim and Survivor Services" with the 12 key agency offices as this will help ensure that victim issues and services continue to be a priority for Corrections. Additionally, we recommend that the Victim Advisory Committee re-convened by YACA in 2003 be retained as a valuable working group for collaborative projects, information sharing, problem solving and solution building.
- 3) We understand that the reorganization plan remains a "work in progress" at this time. With that in mind, we recommend that the new Vision and Mission statements adopted by Corrections reflect the organization's commitment to offender

accountability and victims' rights and services. Measures of the success of the reorganization will likely include how effectively Corrections holds offenders accountable for their crimes, works to uphold victims' rights, and provides key services such as information, notification, and restitution. We suggest that the inclusion of offender accountability and victims' rights and services in the Vision and Mission statements will place Corrections' recognition of victims' issues "up front" and underscore their integral role to the agency's purpose.

- 4) The victim-related components of the Strategic Plan (Goal 5, Strategy 5.4—5.5) highlight the basic post-sentencing victims' rights and services and reflect ambitious yet achievable actions and timelines. The Victim/Witness leadership looks forward to working with the Corrections' leadership on these goals and their implementation. In some cases, that may start with pilot programs that can be replicated statewide if they prove successful. (For example, a collaborative pilot project between Corrections and a local District Attorney's Office which automates crime victim contact information could pave the way to a statewide automated project, vastly improving Corrections' current method of obtaining victim contact information.) We encourage Corrections to work closely with the CVWCC membership on further details of the action plans in order to ensure local buy-in, feasibility and victim satisfaction.
- 5) Efforts have been made to cross-train local victim service providers and Corrections' victim service personnel, but much more needs to be done. Historically, pre-sentencing victim services (local level) and post-sentencing victim services (Corrections) have not been well coordinated resulting in failures to notify victims regarding offender releases and other key events. We recommend that Corrections' personnel send training teams to counties or regions to enhance this coordination effort. Given the dire condition of local travel budgets, it is unrealistic for local providers to travel to Sacramento for ongoing training. Current efforts by Corrections to conduct basic training with advocates can continue to be accomplished through the California Victim Services Training Institute (CVSTI), California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CalCASA) and the newly merged domestic violence coalition.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this input on the Governor's reorganization plan for the Youth and Adult Correctional Agency. If we can provide additional information, please contact me, Cindy Marie Absey, at (805)781-5822.